Sri Amritsar Yatra



The Holy city of Amritsar derives its name from Amrit Sarovar, literally a Pool of Nectar, the holy tank that surrounds the fabulous Golden Temple. Historically also known as Ramdaspur and colloquially as Ambarsar, Amritsar is in Punjab state in north-western India, 25 km east of the border with Pakistan. Amritsar is home to the magnificent Harmandir Sahib, commonly known as the Golden Temple, the spiritual and cultural centre for the Sikh religion. The Golden Temple "gurudwara", as Sikh temples are called, is a serene place and the holiest of shrines, radiating a calm that makes people bow their heads in reverence. Amritsar was founded in 1577 by the fourth Sikh guru, Guru Ram Das. The fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan, designed Harmandir Sahib to be built in the centre of this holy tank, and upon its construction, installed the Adi Granth, the holy scripture of Sikhism, inside Harmandir Sahib and is regarded as the abode of God's spiritual attribute. This sacred shrine is equally revered by all faiths. Harmandir Sahib Temple is open 24 hours, and inside the Temple there is constant Kirtan.

Rama-tirtha-sarovara, a very important site of the great sage Valmiki's ashram is in Amritsar. Valmiki wrote Ramayana here. Mother Sita spent her period of exile at this place in Valmiki ashram, after Lord Ramacandra banished Sita, His wife and eternal consort, during His later earthly pastimes. Pregnant and alone, Sita sought shelter at the ashram of Valmiki, where she soon gave birth to Lava and Kusha, sons of Lord Ramacandra at this ashram. Lava and Kusha spent their childhood here at Valmiki's ashram. During Ashvamedha Yajna by Lord Ramacandra, Lava and Kusha captured a challenged horse. The fight between Lord Ramacandra's forces and Lava and Kusha took place here at Rama-tirtha-sarovara. Lava and Kusha tied Hanuman to a tree at a place near to today's Durgiana Temple. The cities of Lahore and Kasur, which are both now in Pakistan, and close to Amritsar, are said to be founded by Lava and Kusha, respectively.

The Samadhi of Shravan Kumar is nearby Amritsar. Shravan, a teenage boy was devout to his blind parents, taking them to pilgrimage by cradling them on his shoulder in a wooden yoke. He was accidently killed by Maharaja Dasaratha, father of Lord Ramacandra. While hunting in the forest, Dasaratha heard a sound near a lake and unleashed an arrow, hoping to hit an animal. When he crossed the lake, he found that his arrow had fatally struck a teenage boy who was bleeding. The boy, Shravan Kumar, told Dasaratha, that he had come to the lake to collect water for his parents, who were both blind. With his dying breath, Shavran requested Dasaratha to take water to his parents and to tell them what had happened. Shravan succumbed to his wounds and when Dasaratha took water for his parents and told them of his tragic mistake, they were unable to bear the shock. Despite acknowledging that it was an accident, they cursed Dasaratha that he too would experience "Putrashoka" (in Sanskrit, "putra" is child/son and "shoka" is grief; grief due to loss of a son). As a result of this curse, Maharaja Dasaratha underwent extreme transcendental pain of separation from his most-beloved son Lord Ramacandra after He left for exile along with Sita and Laxmana.

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-acarya of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) visited Amritsar in October 1970. Srila Prabhupada spent 10 days in Amritsar and attended the Vedanta Sammelan. Although it was only scheduled for a few hours, Srila Prabhupada didn't limit his preaching. He preached every hour of the day. Because the Vedanta Sammelan was full of so-called experts commenting on Mayavadi philosophy, Srila Prabhupada addressed Mayavadi. He explained elaborately the distinction between Lord Krishna and the living entity and explained how the Lord, when He appears, displays certain unmistakable characteristics that identify Him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There were thousands of people in the audience. His presentation pleased everyone, and the committee members honoured him by making him president of the Vedanta Sammelan.

Visiting the Golden Temple, a guide took Srila Prabhupada and his disciples around and answered their questions. Srila Prabhupada was very impressed with their prasadam distribution program. The Sikhs feed everyone, every day out of the Gurdwaras, and they say no one in the town should go hungry. This interested Prabhupada, and he observed their massive operation. As Srila Prabhupada along with his disciples watched how the Sikhs performed the cooking of all this prasada, Srila Prabhupada instructed the devotees that this is how he wants prasadam distribution to be done. Srila Prabhupada signed the guest book at Golden Temple: "A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami." Under Religion he wrote "Krsnaite." And under Comments he wrote "very spiritual." Srila Prabhupada and the devotees went on to visit various places, including Rama Tirtha Sarovara, the lake where the great sage Valmiki had his asrama. Srila Prabhupada was flooded with invitations from families to come and visit their homes. He accepted as many invitations as possible-more than possible preaching Krishna Consciousness.

Amritsar lies 25 km east of the border with Pakistan. It is well connected by air, rail and bus with various cities in India. Amritsar is 450 km from Delhi and 235 km from Chandigarh. There is also a bus service to Lahore, 35 km away, which is the only overland connection between India and Pakistan.

Important places to visit Amritsar:

1. *Sri Harmandir Sahib - Golden Temple*
2. *Sri Rama Tirtha Sarovara - Valmiki ashram*
3. *Sri Durgiana Temple*
4. *Samadhi of Shravan*
5. *ISKCON Amritsar (Hare Krishna) Temple*
6. *Sri Goindwal Sahib Temple*

1. Sri Harmandir Sahib - Golden Temple

Amritsar is home to the magnificent Harmandir Sahib, commonly known as the *Golden Temple*, the spiritual and cultural centre for the Sikh religion. Harmandir Sahib is a two-storey marble structure built in the centre of the *Pool of Nectar*. Amritsar was founded in 1577 by the fourth Sikh guru, Guru Ram Das. The fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan, designed Harmandir Sahib to be built in the centre of this holy tank, and upon its construction, installed the *Adi Granth (The Eternal Shabad Guru of Sikh Faith)*, the holy scripture of Sikhism, inside Harmandir Sahib. The central dome of the Temple and the upper half of the walls were covered with gold leafed copper sheets by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, a great Sikh king. The canopy and other precious covered Pumalas (sized clothes) are changed daily are offered humbly by the devotees now-a-days. There is a small Shish-Mahal (Hall of the Mirrors) on the upper storey of the Temple. The four doors of the holy Golden Temple are symbolic that people from East, West, North or South can enter this place irrespective of caste, creed and sex. This sacred shrine is equally revered by all faiths.

As stated in *Brhad Naradiya Purana*, and reaffirmed and propagated by Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu,

harer nama harer nama harer namaiva kevalam
kalau nasty eva nasty eva nasty eva gatir anyatha

"In this Age of Kali there is no other means, no other means, no other means for self-realization than chanting the holy name, chanting the holy name, chanting the holy name of Lord Hari."

Similarly Sikhs also believe,

Kalyug Kewal Naam Adhara,
Simar-Simar Nar Utarahin Para
Meaning, in Kaliyuga only chanting of Lord's holy name is enough to sail the human beings through the deep sea of the world.

Inside Golden Temple there are following places to visit: *Sikh Museum, Dukh Bhanjni Beri, Guru Ka Langar (Master's Free Community Kitchen), Sri Guru Ram Das Niwas, Sri Guru Hargobind Niwas, Sri Guru Arjan Dev Niwas, Mata Ganga Ji Niwas and Sri Akal Takhat Sahib (Primary seat of Sikh religious authority).*

Outer entrance of Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple)

Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) Amritsar

Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) Amritsar

Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) Amritsar

Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) Amritsar

Main entrance of Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple)

Devout devotees at Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple)

Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) Amritsar

Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple) Amritsar

Akal Takhat - Primary seat of Sikh religious authority



Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar

This place is just next to Golden Temple. This is where on 13 April 1919 when a crowd of non-violent protesters, along with Baishakhi pilgrims, who had gathered, were fired upon by troops of the British Indian Army under the command of Colonel Reginald Dyer.

2. Sri Rama Tirtha Sarovara - Valmiki Ashram

***Sri Rama-tirtha-sarovara**, a very important site of the great sage Valmiki ashram is in Amritsar. Valmiki wrote Ramayana here. Mother Sita spent her period of exile at this place in Valmiki ashram, after Rama banished Sita, His wife and eternal consort, during His later earthly pastimes. Pregnant and alone, Sita sought shelter at the ashram of Valmiki, where she soon gave birth to Lava and Kusha, sons of Lord Ramacandra at this ashram. Lava and Kusha spent their childhood here at Valmiki ashram. During Ashvamedha Yajna by Lord Ramacandra, Lava and Kush captured a challenge horse. The fight between Lord Ramacandra's forces and Lava and Kusha took place here at Rama-tirtha-sarovara. Lava and Kusha tied Hanuman to a tree near to today's Durgiana Temple. Nearby cities to Amritsar, Lahore and Kasur, which are both now in Pakistan, are said to be founded by Lava and Kusha, respectively. At Sri Rama Tirtha there are actual sites where there was Valmiki ashram, birth site of Lava and Kusha, kitchen of Mother Sita, well where Sita washed clothes and others. Recently a beautiful Temple is constructed in the middle of Rama Tirtha Sarovara to commemorate Valmiki ashram.*

[Ref. Srila Prabhupada Lilamrta chapter 32, Ramayana by His Holiness Bhakti Vikasa Swami Maharaj and Valmiki Ramayana by His Grace Purnaprajna Das]

Banishment of Sita

One day Lord Ramacandra understood that Sita was pregnant. He expressed His great pleasure, saying, *"O lovely princess, is there any desire within your heart that you feel has*

not yet been gratified? Please inform Me if there is, for I shall fulfill your every wish without fail." Sita replied, *"O Lord, in Your association all my desires have been abundantly fulfilled. However, since You are asking, I admit I have a strong desire to visit the asrama of the rsis situated on the banks of the Ganga, and offer my obeisances to the great saints living there."* Rama assured her, *"My dear Sita, please know that very soon you will have the opportunity to visit the rsis in the forest."*

Thereafter, Rama entered the royal assembly and engaged in joking and light conversation with His advisors. Rama then asked Bharda, "What do the citizens talk about these days? What do they say about Sita, Laxmana, Bharata and Satrughna? How do they feel about Our mother, Kaikeyi, and Myself? Indeed, kings are always the topic of criticism for the people." With folded hands, Bharda replied, *"O Lord, everyone praises Your victory over the ten-headed Ravana. They acclaim You as the greatest of all heroes." Rama, however, urged, "Tell Me truthfully what they say. Only by knowing matters as they are can one curtail his faults, and thus endeavor for self-improvement. O Bharda, there is no need for you to be afraid. I have already understood that envious people are spreading rumors about Me through Ayodhya. I have even personally heard some people criticize Me for taking back a woman who remained so long in the house of another."*

Hearing this, Bharda bowed to Rama and replied, "*Whether good or bad, I do not know. However, this is what people are saying in the marketplaces and in the city streets: 'Rama has performed an extraordinary feat by bridging the ocean and vanquishing powerful Ravana. Still, has it never occurred to Him that He has brought home a woman that was abducted by the Raksasa and forced to sit on his lap? Does Lord Rama not feel disgust while enjoying a woman who remained with Ravana for almost one full year? Whatever a king does, the subjects must follow, and so now we have to tolerate unfaithfulness from our wives.'" "O Lord, it is these and other similar words that the people of Ayodhya speak about You."*

Lord Rama felt shocked and dismayed upon hearing this. He asked the other ministers if what Bhadra had spoken was true, and they all confirmed that it was so. Actually, Lord Rama knew perfectly well of Sitadevi's complete purity and innocence. Nevertheless, He could not tolerate the shame of having to hear how people were mocking Him in this way. Because of this, Lord Rama made up His mind to abandon His unsuspecting wife. Lord Rama then asked the spies to disclose what they had heard from the subjects the previous evening. With great reluctance, and after being repeatedly asked to do so, the 6th spy informed Lord Rama of what the washerman had said. Lord Rama was greatly shocked to hear this report. Indeed, He fainted onto the floor. After regaining His composure, Lord Rama called for Bharata and confided in him all that had happened. Enraged, Bharata was ready to go and kill the washerman. With great endeavor, he tried to convince Lord Rama of mother Sitadevi's purity. Lord Rama then said, *"I know that My wife is pure and uncontaminated, but still, I will abandon her, for I am afraid of public scandal. Take your sharp sword and cut off My head, or else abandon Sitadevi in the forest."*

Upon hearing this, Bharata lost consciousness and fainted. Lord Rama then called for Laxmana and said, "My dear brother, what I have to say is very painful, but please listen to Me with great care and attention. I have just learned that many of the citizens are criticizing Me for bringing Sita back from Lanka. Just see how distressed I have become! I have appeared in the royal dynasty of Iksvaku, and so I would rather die than have any stain of dishonor become attached to My name. After killing Ravana, I had also considered, 'How can I take Sita back to Ayodhya?' It was to allay these fears that I made the princess of Mithila enter the fire in the presence of all the demigods and great rishis. At that time Vayu and Agni had declared that Sita was pure, and within My heart, I knew that she was chaste, and so I happily accepted her, but now rumors are being spread everywhere, and I am being blamed in My own kingdom."

"O Laxmana, as long as one's misbehavior is the subject of rumors, one has to suffer great humiliation and defamation. Improper activities are always condemned, and that is what motivates the noble-minded toward good acts. I am ready to give up My life if necessary, to avoid public scandal. In fact, I am ready to renounce even you, My dear brother, if it is required for insuring My good name and reputation, and so what to speak of Sitadevi! I feel as if I am drowning in an ocean of sorrow! Never before have I experienced such misfortune!" "My dear Laxmana, tomorrow at dawn I want You to take Sita to the Ganga and give her a tour of all the asramas of the great rishis. When You come to Valmiki's asrama, which is by the side of the River Tamasa, I want You to abandon her and come back to Ayodhya alone." "My dear brother, You must carry out My order without any argument, for even the slightest hesitation on Your part will make Me very displeased with You. In fact, let it be known that anyone who objects to My decision will immediately become My worst enemy. Just a little while ago, Sita told Me that she wants very much to visit all the asramas along the shore of the Ganga. Now go and fulfill her desire."

Laxmana became brokenhearted while hearing Lord Rama speak, but since he was the very obedient servant of his elder brother, he gave His consent without hesitation. Early the next morning, Laxmana went to Sitadevi and said, *"Your husband has ordered Me to fulfill your desire. I will escort you to the Ganga so that you can worship the great rishis residing there. Sumantra is ready with the chariot, and so I request you to come at once." Sitadevi was delighted. After putting on her finest dress and most exquisite jewelry, she told Laxmana, "I will distribute these, along with other gifts, to the wives of the great rishis."* Laxmana helped Sitadevi onto the chariot, and they quickly departed, but as they proceeded, she anxiously said, *"O Laxmana, my right eye has begun to twitch and my mind feels strangely uneasy. I suddenly feel very weak, and the world seems to look so gloomy. I hope that my Lord is alright." Sitadevi offered prayers to the demigods for the welfare of her husband and other relatives. Laxmana replied in a voice choked because of his tears, "I hope that you do not meet with any misfortune."*

By evening, Sitadevi, Laxmana and Sumantra came to the River Gomati, and so they spent the night there. Early the next morning they continued their journey, and by afternoon they came to the Ganga. However, after dismounting, Laxmana broke down and cried, for He could no longer contain His grief. With great concern, Sitadevi inquired, *"My dear Laxmana, what's wrong? Now that we have reached our destination, You should be happy! Your sadness makes me feel very uneasy. Has just two days separation from my Lord brought You such anguish? I love my husband very dearly, but still I am not disturbed like You! O Laxmana, please compose Yourself. We have to cross the Ganga so that we can meet the great rishis. After that, we can quickly return to Ayodhya, for I also miss my Lord very much."*

After wiping the tears from His eyes, Laxmana arranged for a boat and escorted Sitadevi across the Ganga. When they reached the other side, Laxmana tearfully confessed, *"O princess of Mithila, all-good Lord Rama has entrusted Me with a very painful task, and by performing this duty I will become infamous in the eyes of the world. It would have been better if I had died rather than execute your husband's order! Noble lady, please forgive Me for what I am being forced to do."*

After saying this, Laxmana fell to the ground and began weeping very bitterly. With great agitation, Sitadevi asked, *"O Laxmana! What is the matter? I cannot understand what You are saying. Please tell me clearly what is troubling You. Is there some great misfortune that has befallen my Lord and You do not have the courage to tell me?" Laxmana stood up, and with His head bowed low He replied in a faltering voice, "While sitting in the royal court, Lord Rama learned that vicious rumors had been circulating throughout Ayodhya, accusing Him of acting with impropriety. Everywhere, people blame Lord Rama for having accepted you back, and this stain on His reputation pains Him unbearably. O mother*

Sitadevi, I know that you are faultless, and so does Lord Rama. Please do not misunderstand your husband. He is being forced to relinquish you, to maintain the good name of the lksvaku dynasty."

"O Princess, do not be heart-broken, for the abodes of the brahmarsis situated nearby are celestially beautiful. You should take shelter of the great sage Valmiki, for he was a good friend of your father-in-law, Maharaja Dasaratha. Always think of Lord Rama within your heart and remain unflinchingly devoted to Him. In this way you will attain the highest happiness. Of this there is no doubt."

Upon hearing of her cruel fate, Sitadevi immediately fainted onto the ground. When she came to her senses, Sitadevi piteously cried out, *"Now I can see that this life has been awarded to me simply for suffering! What great sin did I commit in the past? What poor girl's marriage did I obstruct, so that now my Lord is casting off His innocent wife? I faithfully followed my husband into exile, and remained content despite all kinds of hardships." "O Laxmana, how will I be able to survive here alone? What will I tell the rishis when they ask me why I was abandoned by my husband? What wrong have I done? I would gladly end my life at once by throwing myself in the Ganga, but that would cause the end of my Lord's dynasty."*

Finally, after becoming somewhat composed, Sitadevi told Laxmana, *"I know that You are simply carrying out Your duty, and so I do not blame You. Go back to Ayodhya and offer my respects to my mothers-in-law. Touch the feet of my husband and deliver this message to Him, 'O Lord, You know that my devotion has always been fixed upon You without deviation. You know of my chastity and unfailing love, and yet, out of fear of dishonor and shame, You have rejected me. O Rama, my Lord and only refuge, You should not do this!'"*

"My dear husband, I do not grieve so much for myself, for I know that I am faultless, and, for a chaste woman, the husband is as good as God. Therefore I must accept whatever You order as being for my welfare, even if it means giving up my life." Laxmana circumambulated Sitadevi and got onto the boat. After reaching the other side, He mounted the waiting chariot. Then, as Laxmana set out for Ayodhya, He turned His head, just to have a last glimpse of Sitadevi. Sitadevi also sorrowfully gazed at Laxmana as He receded into the distance. Being all alone and unprotected, Sitadevi gave full vent to her grief by falling onto the ground and sobbing uncontrollably.

Laxmana said, *"O Sumantra, what terrible pain Lord Rama will have to suffer now that He has abandoned His dear wife. It seems as if that great destroyer of Raksasas is Himself under the control of cruel Destiny! I am sure that the sorrow Lord Rama will feel now will far exceed that which He experienced while living in exile by the order of His father."* Sumantra was able to pacify Laxmana, and after spending the night by the side of the river, they resumed their journey early the next morning. Meanwhile, some of Valmiki's disciples happened to see Sitadevi weeping. They ran to their guru and said, *"Come quickly! There is a woman who resembles the goddess of fortune, sitting alone in the forest and crying!"*

By his mystic power, Valmiki could understand everything. He rushed to the spot where the bereaved Sitadevi sat, and very humbly approached her. Valmiki mildly said, *"O devoted wife of Lord Rama and daughter of King Janaka, by the strength of my austerities, I know all that happens within the three worlds, and thus I can understand your plight. Please do not be afraid. Near my asrama some female ascetics reside, and they will care for you very devotedly, as if you were their daughter. Please come with me now. Consider this to be your new home."*

Valmiki took Sitadevi and placed her under the care of the lady ascetics. Meanwhile, after arriving at Ayodhya, Laxmana entered the royal palace. There, He saw Lord Rama sitting in a terribly distracted state of mind, shedding tears while absorbed in a state of deep contemplation. Upon seeing this, Laxmana's eyes also filled with tears.

After bowing down, Laxmana spoke as follows, in a voice laden with great sorrow, *"My dear brother, in accordance with Your order, I abandoned mother Sitadevi on the shore of the Ganga near Valmiki's asrama. O Lord Rama, there is no use in giving way to such grief. After all, in this world, meeting and separation are concomitant factors. It is inevitable that one's wife, son, and indeed, one's very life must one day be given up. Because of this, intelligent persons always pass through life's journey with an attitude of detachment." "My dear brother, Your unlimited prowess controls the three worlds. Why then do You not suppress this despondency? Cast off this weakness! Otherwise, more rumors will circulate. What will people think?"* Lord Rama became pacified by Laxmana's words, and thus He gradually cast off His grief.



Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana Hanuman

Valmiki Tirtha Sthal - Sri Ram Tirtha

Valmiki Rsi with Lava and Kusha. Mother Sita Devi with Lava and Kusha.

Sri Rama-tirtha-sarovara - Valmiki Rsi's Ashram

Sri Rama-tirtha-sarovara - Valmiki Rsi's Ashram

Sri Rama-tirtha-sarovara - Valmiki Rsi’s Ashram

Sri Rama-tirtha-sarovara - Valmiki Rsi’s Ashram

Valmiki Rsi

Valmiki Rsi's Ashram

Well at Valmiki Rsi's ashram where mother Sita washed the clothes

Kitchen of mother Sita devi

Valmiki Rsi's ashram

Valmiki Rsi's ashram

Valmiki Rsi writing Ramayana

Valmiki Rsi's Ashram

Valmiki Rsi's Ashram

Actual spot where mother Sita Devi gave birth to Lava and Kusha

Exact spot where Lava and Kusha bound the Asvamedha-yajna horse sent by Lord Ramacandra

Exact spot where Lava and Kusha bound the Asvamedha-yajna horse

Lava and Kusha binding the Asvamedha-yajna horse to the banyan tree

Banyan tree to which Lava and Kusha bound the Asvamedha-yajna horse

Temple at the exact spot where Lava and Kusha bound the Asvamedha-yajna horse

Lava and Kusha Pathshala (school)

3. Sri Durgiana Temple

Sri Durgiana Temple is a very important Temple. In the courtyard of the temple is a tree where Lava and Kusha bound Hanuman after they captured challenge horse of the Ashvamedha Yajna. Iksvaku, the grandson of Sun-god performed a number of Yagyas on this land. In *Bhagavad-Gita chapter 4 verse 1*, Lord Sri Krishna says, "I instructed this imperishable science of yoga to the sun-god, Vivasvan, and Vivasvan instructed it to Manu, the father of mankind, and Manu in turn instructed it to Iksvaku." The architecture of Sri Durgiana Temple is similar to Golden Temple. The original temple was built in 16th century. It was rebuilt in 1921 by Guru Harsai Mal Kapoor in the architectural style of the Sikh Golden Temple. The temple is built in the middle of a sacred lake. A bridge provides the approach to the temple.

Lord Ramacandra Performs the Asvamedha-yajna

One day, the great sage Agastya came to see Lord Rama at His royal court. During their conversation, Lord Rama expressed His great unhappiness at having killed Ravana, due to his being the son of a *brahmana*. Agastya assured Lord Rama that there was no fault on His part, but still, he suggested that He perform the *asvamedha-yajna*. Lord Rama agreed to this proposal and then asked Agastya to go to His stables and select a suitable horse. Thereafter, all the necessary paraphernalia was collected. Lord Rama then accompanied Agastya to the shore of the River Sarayu. There, Lord Ra-ma used a golden plough to prepare the sacrificial arena, and many palatial buildings were constructed. All the great rishis were then invited. Being extremely eager to see Lord Rama, Narada, Asita, Parvata, Kapila, Arigira, Vyasa, Atri, Yajnavalkya, and Sukadeva, as well as numerous others, soon arrived at Ayodhya. Lord Rama gave them all gifts of cows and gold. Later, as they were all seated together, Lord Rama questioned the great *rishis*, and they in turn gave Him instructions on various subjects. After some days, Vasishtha Muni informed Lord Ra-ma that the proper time for releasing the challenge-horse had arrived. Lord Ra-ma then ordered Laxmana to bring a suitable horse. In turn, Laxmana spoke to the military commanders, instructing them to be ready to depart, for the protection of the challenge-horse.

The commander-in-chief, Kalajit, then brought the horse to be sacrificed. This horse was decorated very nicely, and the necessary rituals were performed. Satrughna was appointed the protector of the horse, as it would roam at will over the earth. Finally, the horse was let loose. Lord Rama ordered Satrughna to follow the horse and defeat anyone who would attempt to capture it. Bharata's son, Puskala, accepted a sword from Lord Rama's hand and took up his position, guarding Satrughna's rear. At this time Lord Rama requested Hanuman to also go and protect Satrughna. The challenge-horse went toward the East. As it passed through numerous kingdoms, no one tried to capture it, out of respect for Lord Rama's prowess. At last, the challenge-horse reached the city of Ahicchatra, which was ruled by King Sumada. The horse entered a beautiful garden there, and Satrughna followed it.

After wandering at will, the horse finally came to the *asrama* of Valmiki Muni. Meanwhile, as Sitadevi's son, Lava, along with many rishis, were collecting firewood in the forest, they happened to see the challenge-horse. Lava went up to the horse and read the note on its forehead and then angrily said to the rishis, "Just see the audacity of this ksatriya! Who is this Lord Rama? Who is Satrughna? They are like insects of little strength!" After saying this, Lava seized the challenge-horse. Soon thereafter, the horse's guards arrived upon the scene and discovered that someone had captured it. Lava drove off these guards with a shower of arrows and so they went to the shelter of Satrughna.
When Satrughna heard from h-is guards about how the challenge-horse had been captured by a boy who had the likeness of Lord Ra-ma, he quickly had his commander, Kalajit, array the army and set out. Thus, Kalajit went and challenged Lava.

After a fierce battle, Lava cut off Kalajit's head with his sword. The survivors went and informed Satrughna of their commander's death and the defeat of the army and so Satrughna next sent Puskala to fight. After an intense duel, Puskala fell from his chariot unconscious onto the battlefield, having been pierced in the chest by Lava's arrow. Next, Hanuman came to challenge the enemy. Thereafter, while fighting, Ha nu ma n found Lava to be unconquerable by him and so he decided to pretend to faint so that Satrughna could take his place. Com-ing before Lava, Satrughna saw that he appeared just like Lord Rama in His child hood. During the fight that followed, Lava made Satrughna fall unconscious onto the floor of his chariot and so the kings, Suratha and Viramani, as well as others, entered the fray. Soon thereafter, when Satrughna regained consciousness, he again approached Lava to fight.

When Satrughna put a blazing arrow upon his bowstring, Lava remembered his brother, Kusa, thinking, *"If my brother were here, I would not be hum-bled by this Satrughna."* That arrow struck Lava in the chest and made him fall unconscious. Satrughna went and took the unconscious Lava onto his chariot while some students of Valmiki went and told Sitadevi about what had happened. Upon hearing how her son had been arrested, she fell to the ground, weeping. Just at this time, Kusa retuned to Valmiki’s asrama, having gone with some rishis to a place of pilgrimage. Upon seeing his mother overcome with grief, Kusa inquired about the cause, and after hearing everything from his mother he set out to encounter the enemies.

Soon thereafter, Satrughna engaged in fighting with Kusa. Before long, a powerful arrow struck his chest, making him fall unconscious onto the battlefield. Hanuman then came to fight with Kusa, but he also soon lost consciousness. Sugriva fought next, but was bound by Kusa's weapon. Lava and Kusa then tied Hanuman and Sugriva together and dragged them back to Valmiki’s *asrama*. Later, when Sitadevi saw how Hanuman and Sugriva were bound by her sons, she laughed at them. She then told her sons, *"Untie these mon-keys immediately. They will die if they see me laughing at them. This is Hanuman and this is Sugriva."*

Sitadevi told Lava and Kusa that they should not have captured Lord Rama's challenge-horse. She also informed them that Lord Rama was their father. In reply, Lava and Kusa said that for ksatriyas, there could be no question of sin, even if sons fight with their father, or disciples fight with their preceptor. Still, Lava and Kusa obeyed their mother by releasing Hanuman and Sugriva, as well as the challenge-horse. Sitadevi then prayed to Lord Rama that Satrughna would regain consciousness and so quickly the son of Sumitra regained his senses. Sumati then advised Satrughna that since the horse was now free, they should return to Ayodhya as quickly as possible. When He heard of the arrival of the challenge-horse and its protectors, Lord Rama sent Laxmana to welcome His brother. Thereafter, Lord Rama happily embraced Satrughna and Puskala, who had fallen at His lotus feet. Finally, at Lord Rama's request, Sumati narrated to Him all that had happened as the challenge-horse wandered over the earth. As a result of hearing this narration, Lord Rama came to understand that the two boys residing at Valmiki’s *asrama* were His sons. Lord Rama then went to Valmiki and asked about the boys. In reply, Valmiki said, *"How is it that You, who live within the hearts of all men, do not know about this without asking?"*

Valmiki related to Lord Rama all that had happened after Laxmana had abandoned Sitadevi in the forest. He also explained how he had composed the Ramayana and then taught it to Lava and Kusa and then requested Lord Rama to take Sitadevi back to Ayodhya, along with her sons. Thus it came to be that Lord Rama sent Laxmana to bring Sitadevi back, and so she came and sat next to Him for the performance of the horse-sacrifice.

The sage, Agastya, handed Lord Rama the consecrated sword and instantaneously, as the sword touched its neck, the horse assumed a divine form and got onto a celestial airplane. When questioned by Lord Rama, that divine person explained, *"In my last life I was a righteous brahmana, but later on I acted in a manner opposed to the Vedas. Indeed, I became hypocrisy personified, for I practised religion in a most duplicitous manner."*

Meanwhile, Valmiki called for Lava and Kusa and instructed them, *"I would like you to go out now and continue reciting Ramayana throughout the land. Go to the homes of brahmanas, the asramas of rishis, and the pa laces of great kings. Sing Ramayana while wandering through the city streets and while traveling through the countryside.'' "First, I want you to go to Ayodhya. If Lord Rama invites you to recite Ramayana before the assembled brahmanas, then do so. Do not accept any payment in return, but simply say, 'What good is gold for those who sim ply subsist on fruit and roots?' If Lord Rama inquires, 'Whose sons are you?' then reply, 'We are Valmiki's disciples.' Sing the verses of Ramayana very sweetly, and make sure that nothing displeases the king, for He 1s considered to be like a father to all living beings." Lava and Kusha replied, "We shall do as you say."*

That night, they slept peacefully with Valmiki's advice firmly fixed in their hearts. Thereafter, it so came to pass that Lava and Kusa began reciting the Ramayana, accompanied by stringed instruments, at Ayodhya. The twins' voices had a transcendental sweetness that made their recitations appear more melodious than the singing of the Gandharvas. The audience was enthralled by their artistry and Lord Rama listened with great curiosity. Turning to one another, people remarked, "Except for the matted hair and deerskin dress, these boys exactly resemble Lord Rama.

When Lava and Kusa suspended their recitation for some period, Lord Rama ordered Laxmana, *"Give these noble-minded boys 20,000 gold coins, costly garments, and whatever else they may desire."* However, when they were offered these gifts, Lava and Kusha refused them, saying, *"What is the use of gold for ascetics who live on fruit and roots?"*

Highly astonished, Lord Rama inquired, *"My dear boys, how many parts are there to this epic poem, and which learned sage has composed it?"* The twins replied, *"O King, the great sage Valmlki is our spiritual master and he is the author of this great literature that narrates the entire history of Your life. The poem consists of six parts, and ne additional part describes Your concluding pastimes. If You so desire, we will recite the entire Ramayana during the intervals of Your great sacrifice." Thereafter, Lord Rama listened with unbounded pleasure as Lava and Kusa recited Ramayana for many days. At last, Lord Rama positively concluded, "These must be the twin sons of Sitadevi. There is no doubt about this!"*

Lord Rama's heart melted due to great affection for His sons. Finally, after considering the matter very deeply, Lord Rama called for messengers of impeccable etiquette and gave them the following order, *"Go at once to Valmiki's asrama and tell him this 'If Sita is actually blameless, if her character is faultlessly pure, the let her come here with your permission so that she can prove her innocence before all the assembled citizens.' "Then, hurry back with Sitadevi's and Valmiki's replies. Let Sita come tomorrow at dawn to establish the truth of her chastity in My presence."*

When Sltadevi heard Lord Rama's message, she could not accept the proposal, for she considered such a public trial to be a great humiliation. Finally, after coming to a firm decision in her mind, Sltadevi dressed in reddish cloth and started for Ayodhya, along with Valmiki. A large crowd had gathered from all corners of the Kosala kingdom. In fact, all

the demigods, headed by Lord Brahma, as well as other celestials and great rishis, came to witness the trial of Sitadevi's purity.

Valmiki then arrived, followed by Sitadevi, her head bent low and her hands joined in supplication. Tears filled her large eyes and Lord Rama was firmly fixed within her heart. While the assembled citizens restlessly murmured in anticipation, Valmiki approached Lord Rama and said, *"O son of Dasaratha, here is the impeccably righteous Sitadevi, whom You abandoned out of fear of public scandal. She has come here to prove her purity, and thus she awaits You r command." "O Lord Rama, I, who have never uttered a lie, make the following declaration, 'If Sitadevi is tainted by even the slightest guilt, may the results of my accumulated austerities prove to be eternally fruitless.' Although You loved Sitadevi deeply, and were convinced of her innocence, You discarded her out of fear of public opinion. By my spiritual vision, I can understand Sitadevi's perfect purity, and so I have come here to proclaim this truth before You."*

Lord Rama gazed upon Sitadevi for a moment and then announced to the assembly, *"So be it! I accept as truth all that the great sage has said. Previously, the demigods had testified to Sitadevi's purity and so I happily brought her back to Ayodhya. Still, people began to criticize Me and so with great reluctance I sent her away. Now I have decided that if Sitadevi can prove her innocence before this assembly, I shall once again accept her as the wife I dearly love."*

Everyone fell silent and fixed their eyes upon Sitadevi, who stood with her gaze lowered and her head bent slightly downward. After a short pause, Sitadevi began to speak within the hearing of the assembled people, "O goddess of the earth, please hear my petition. If, since the time of my marriage, I have never thought of anyone but my husband, and if I have never loved any man but my husband, then grant me shelter. In thought, word and action, if I have only dwelt in my Lord and no one else, then give me a place within you so that I need not experience the sham of facing these slanderous people!"

As Sitadevi was speaking, the earth suddenly opened, and from out of the crevice the goddess Bhumi majestically arose, seated upon a celestial throne borne by divine serpents. The goddess smilingly welcomed Sitadevi and took her in her arms, seating her on the throne by her side. As all beings in the sky and on the earth looked on in astonishment, the celestial throne began to descend into the bowels of the earth.

There was an uproar as all beings uttered exclamations of wonder, praising Sitadevi for this glorious confirmation of her purity. From the heavens, the demigods showered flowers while singing and playing musical instruments.

After Sitadevi disappeared from sight, Lord Rama picked up a staff that had been used during the sacrifice, and while leaning on it, gave vent to His intolerable grief. As tears filled His eyes and anger flared up within His mind, Lord Rama lowered His head and declared, *"O Earth, you had better return My Sita immediately or else open up once more so that I can be reunited with her. Sita is your daughter and so I am your son-inlaw. Give Me Sita without delay or I will crush your mountains, burn your forests, and then smash you into atoms!"*

Lord Brahma said, *"My Lord, please remember Your identity! You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Visnu and Sitadevi is the goddess of fortune! She has entered the planet of the Nagas, and very shortly will be reunited with You in Your transcendental abode, Vaikuntha."*

"O Supreme hero, O Lord of the universe and sustainer of all that lives, why must I remind You of Your divine position? O Lord Rama, give up Your grief and hear from Your sons the

concluding portion of the great narration that describes Your transcendental pastimes. Th1s ep1c poem, which was composed by Valmiki, will spread Your glories throughout the three worlds for as long as the universe continues to exist." Having said this, Lord Brahma disappeared from view. Lord Rama then went to Valmiki's *asrama*, along with Lava and Kusha. After passing the night, grieving over the loss of Sitadevi, Lord Rama summoned all the *rishis* and requested His sons to recite the *Uttarakhanda* of Ramayana.



Sri Durgiana Temple - here Lava and Kusha bound Hanuman to the banyan tree

Sri Durgiana Temple, Amritsar

Way to ancient Hanuman Temple

Sacred banyan tree to which Hanuman was bound by Lava and Kusha

Lava and Kusha binding Hanuman

Sri Hanuman

Sacred banyan tree to which Hanuman was bound by Lava and Kusha

Sacred banyan tree to which Hanuman was bound by Lava and Kusha

Sri Hanuman

Sri Sri Radha Krishna

Sri Sri Sita Rama Laxmana and Hanuman at Sri Durgiana Temple

Sri Sri Laxmi Narayana

Sri Sri Radha Krishna and Giriraj Ji

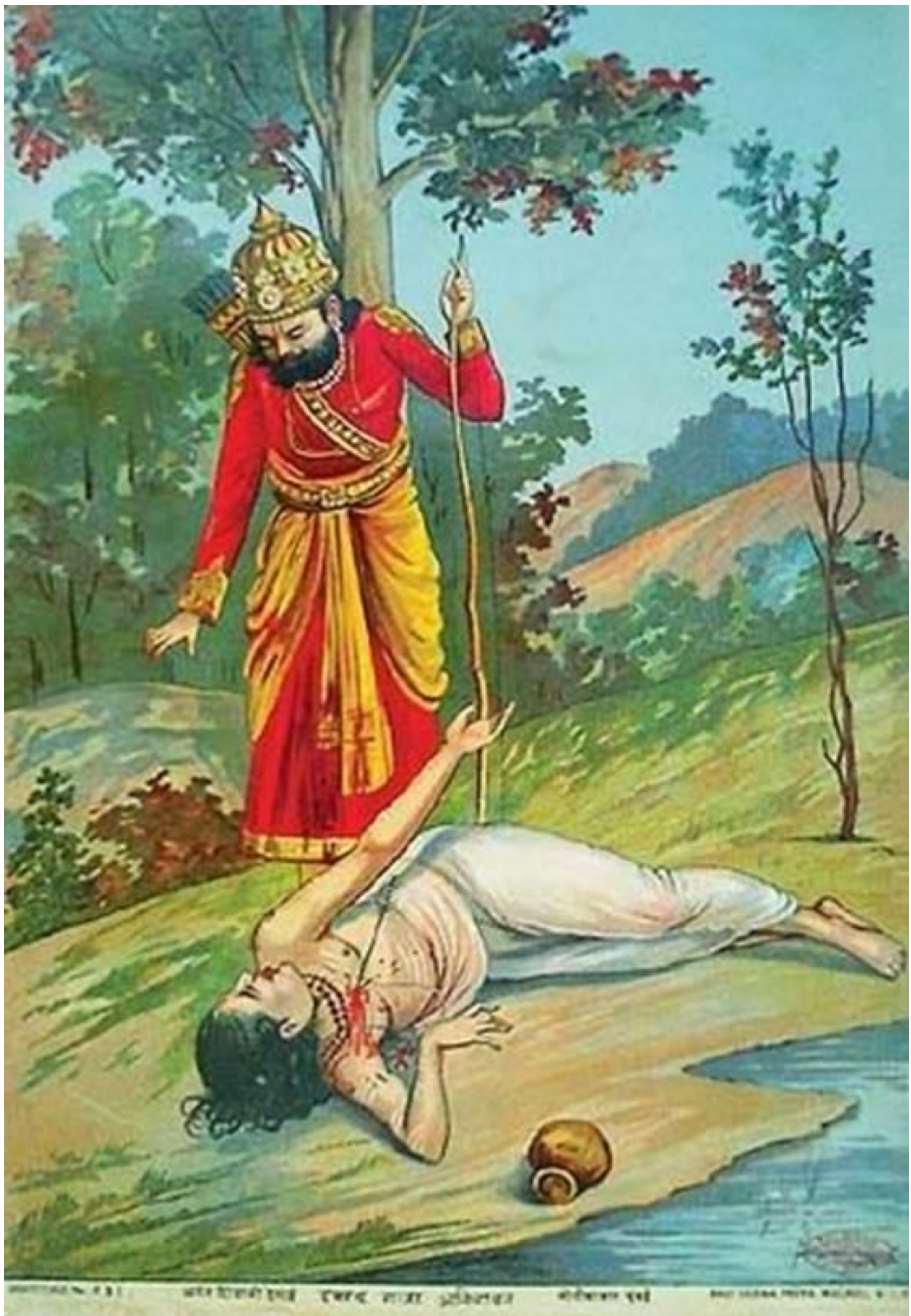
4. Samadhi of Shravan

Samadhi of Shravan Kumar is nearby Amritsar. Shravan, a teenage boy was devout to his blind parents, taking them to pilgrimage by cradling them on his shoulder in a wooden

device. He was accidently killed by Maharaja Dasaratha, father of Lord Ramacandra. While hunting in the forest, Dasaratha heard a sound near a lake and unleashed an arrow, hoping to hit an animal. When he crossed the lake, he found that his arrow had fatally struck a teenage boy who was bleeding. The boy, Shravan Kumar, told Dasaratha, that he had come to the lake to collect water for his parents, who were both blind. With his dying breath, Shavran requested Dasaratha to take water to his parents and to tell them what happened. Shravan succumbed to his wounds and when Dasaratha took water for his parents and told them of his tragic mistake, they were unable to bear the shock. Despite acknowledging that it was an accident, they cursed Dasaratha that he too would experience "Putrashoka" (Sanskrit, "putra" is child/son and "shoka" is grief; grief due to loss of a son). As a result of this curse, Maharaja Dasaratha also had to bear extreme pain of separation from his son Lord Rama when He was sent to exile.



Shravan Kumar carrying his elderly blind parents to pilgrimage by cradling them on his shoulder in a wooden yoke



Shravan Kumar accidently killed by Maharaja Dasaratha

Beautiful fields on the way to Samadhi of Shravan Kumar

Samadhi of Shravan Kumar

Samadhi tomb of Shravan Kumar

Inside the Samadhi of Shravan Kumar

5. ISKCON Amritsar (Hare Krishna) Temple

ISKCON Amritsar Temple is 10 min walk from Golden Temple. The presiding deities are Sri Sri Gaur Radha Krishna and Sri Sri Jagannatha, Baladeva, Subhadra. Here Lord Krishna's

deity is more than 300 years old and worshiped from that time. Temple address is: *Sri Sri Gaur Radha Krishna Temple, Chowk Moni, Laxmansar, Amritsar.*

Sri Sri Gaur Radha Krishna - ISKCON Amritsar Temple

Sri Sri Gaur Radha Krishna - ISKCON Amritsar Temple

Their Lordships Sri Sri Radha Krishna at ISKCON Amritsar Temple

Their Lordships Sri Sri Jagannatha, Baladeva, Subhadra

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder-acarya of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

ISKCON Amritsar Temple

ISKCON Amritsar Temple

Govinda's restaurant in Amritsar city

6. Sri Goindwal Sahib Temple

Goindwal Sahib, first centre of Sikhism, holds immense significance in reference to the Sikh pilgrimage sites. The town lies south east of Amritsar and 30 km away from the city.

This holy place (*Baoli Sahib*) was recognized by Guru Amar Das Ji (the third Guru) in year 1552 AD, and he personally helped in the construction of the Gurdwara and Baoli (sacred well) with 84 steps leading down to it. The devout believe that by reciting *Japji Sahib*, the divine Word revealed to Guru Nanak Dev at each step after taking a bath in the Baoli delivers one from 84,00,000 cycles of life of this world. The entrance of place is well decorated with murals describing significant scenes of the Sikh history. Today the Gurudwara and Goindwal Baoli is visited as a prime destination for pilgrimage and the massive langar or the community kitchen provides prasadam to the large number of visitors every day. Sri Guru Amar Das stayed in Goindwal for 33 years. *"Har saans mein ho sumiran tera yoo beet jaye jeevan mera"* meaning *"O my merciful Lord, please bless me in such a way that in every breath I take, I remember Your holy name and glories, and the whole of life is spent in the same fashion."*



Sri Goindwal Sahib Temple



Baoli Sahib (sacred well) with 84 steps leading down to it

Wagah border: The international border between India and Pakistan. The pomp and pageantry of the *Beating Retreat and the Change of Guard* within handshaking distance of the Indian and Pakistani forces makes for a most charming spectacle. Wagah, an army outpost on Indo-Pak border, between Amritsar and Lahore, is an elaborate complex of buildings, roads and barriers on both sides. The daily highlight is the evening *"Beating the Retreat"* ceremony. Soldiers from both countries march in perfect drill, going through the steps of bringing down their respective national flags. As the sun goes down, nationalistic fervour rises and lights are switched on marking the end of the day amidst thunderous applause.

Map

Wagah: India-Pakistan Border

Wagah Border



Beating Retreat and the Change of Guard Ceremony

Beating Retreat and the Change of Guard Ceremony

Delhi - Lahore - Delhi bus service

Directions to reach Amritsar:

Amritsar situated in Punjab state of north-western India lies 25 km east of the border with Pakistan.

By Air: Amritsar's airport - Sri Guru Ram Das Ji International Airport is well connected by flights from all over India.

By Train: Amritsar is connected by direct trains to major Indian cities.

By Road: Bus services connect Amritsar with most north Indian towns, including Chandigarh (235 km), Delhi (450 km), Shimla, Rishikesh and Jammu. There is also a bus service to Lahore, 25 km away, which is the only overland connection between India and Pakistan.



Amritsar

Srila Prabhupada's visit to Amritsar: www.vedabase.com/en/spl/4/32

ISKCON Amritsar: http://iskconamritsar.com/

Mayapur TV: http://Mayapur.tv / **Vrindavana TV:** http://Vrindavana.tv

Holy Pilgrimages: www.Holy-Pilgrimages.com / **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/HolyPilgrimages
Holy Dham: www.HolyDham.com

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